DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 023 48 HE 000 456

By-Semmel, Melvyn I.

The Influence of Disability Labels and Dialect Differences on the Semantic Differential Responses of College Students.

Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor. Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-6-1784
Pub Date 1 Sep 68
Contract-OEC-3-6-061784
Note-12p.; Submitted to USOE as one of Studies in Language and Language Behavior, Progress Report VII, September 1, 1968.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
Descriptors-American English, *Dialects, Experiments, *Higher Education, Individual Characteristics, Language Research, *Language Usage, Nonstandard Dialects, *Semantics, *Student Attitudes

A 15-minute interview was conducted separately with 2 5th grade boys (1 Caucasian, 1 Negro) who were matched on 10 and 4 pupil characteristics: home background, personality, social behavior, and academic ability. A semantic differential scale was constructed for the 4 characteristics, and 5 disability labels were assigned to each child: orthopedically handicapped, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, culturally deprived, and normal. Tapes of the 2 interviews were used in an experiment to study how dialects and disability labels would interact to affect conclusions drawn by 100 college juniors about the personal characteristics of the boys. Results showed that the disability labels had no meaningful effect upon the semantic differential scores. Semantic differential ratings on the personality scale for the interviews revealed no significant differences, but while mean scale scores for the 4 characteristics on the Caucasian child's tape did not differ, the personality scale mean for the Negro child's tape was higher than the other three characteristics. Later, 128 college juniors who had not participated in the experiment were asked to differentiate transcripts of the tapes according to race of interviewee. There was little evidence of ability to identify the race of either pupil from his verbal behavior, which suggests that negative r2 which suggests that negative inferences made in the experiment about the Negro child were probably caused by dialectical features of the taped interview. It may be that linguistic cues supplied by dialect are strong enough to minimize labeling effects. (WM)

BR-6-1784
PA 48

ED026023

AR-7
9-1-68

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

THE INFLUENCE OF DISABILITY LABELS AND DIALECT DIFFERENCES ON THE SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS[1]

Melvyn I. Semmel

Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior

The University of Michigan

Semantic differential (SD) responses of 100 college juniors following 2 structured interviews with children were assessed. The children's verbal responses were characterized by standard or non-standard (Negro) dialect. Different disability labels were assigned to each child. SD responses were made relative to children's personality, social behavior, academic and intellectual ability, and home background.

Results indicated significant differences between SD responses as a function of dialect and characteristics measured. The main effects were, however, qualified by a significant interaction between these variables. Differences between disability labels were not significant.

In a subsequent study typescripts of the two interviews were distributed to 128 college juniors. Ss were asked to identify the "Negro" and "White" children from reading the typescripts, but were unable to do so. It was inferred that the results from the first investigation were probably produced by reactions to dialect rather than to other differences in the content of the interviews (i.e., sentence length).

While there appears to be a hierarchy of connotative reactions to verbal labels denoting disability (Semmel & Dickson, 1966), the relative effects of such labeling on evaluative behavior in the presence of minimal cues provided by the labeled subject have not been extensively investigated. Labeled children provide linguistic cues through their utterances, which may or may not confirm the validity of the label. The dialect of a labeled speaker may offer cues which interact with the label to mediate the listener's evaluative inferences about the home background, personality and academic ability of the speaker. Asch (1946), Kelley (1950) and others have demonstrated the effect of minimal cues on judgmental behavior toward others. The work reported by Lambert (1967) and Guskin (1968) exemplifies how perception of minimal linguistic cues affects judgments of personality.

HE 002 456

The present study was designed to investigate the interactive effects of disability labels and of the dialectical features of labeled children's utterances on the evaluative inferences drawn by teachers in training about the personality, social behavior, academic intellectual ability, and home background of labeled speakers. Labels were assigned to each of two children by means of task directions read by Ss before they started listening to two tape recordings of the children engaged in a structured interview. The oral stimuli were characterized in the one case by a standard mid-western American dialect, and in the other, by a non-standard, "Negro dialect." It was hypothesized that disability labels interact with the phonological features of Negro dialect to produce relatively less positive evaluative semantic differential responses to the labeled Negro than to the labeled Caucasian child. The phonological features of dialect are viewed as powerful cues associated with intellectual, behavioral and social characteristics of a speaker. Hence, when a speaker is assigned a disability label denoting intellectual, social or emotional deviance, his dialect serves as an external source of verification either to strengthen or weaken the affective meaning of the label--which subsequently mediates evaluative inferences about the speaker.

Method

Subjects

One hundred college juniors enrolled in introductory courses in educational psychology at the University of Michigan served as Ss for the study.

Construction of Taped Interviews

Two fifth-grade boys from the same public school class were matched as closely as possible on IQ, academic ability, personality characteristics and social class background. No formal matching criteria were established other than subjective opinions of the E and of the teacher of the boys. Both children were in the fifth grade and had no history of school difficulty. John G. (Caucasian) was judged to have "normal" speech with a characteristic mid-western American accent. Monty P. (Negro) was judged to have "normal" speech with a non-standard "Southern Negro" accent.

A tape recording was made of a short structured interview (15 min.) conducted with the boys by a female graduate student using a standardized

set of questions. Table 1 presents the 16 questions asked in serial order by the same interviewer to each of the two boys in separate sessions.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Analysis of the taped interviews revealed no difference in the type-token rations (TTR) of the two children's responses. The Negro boy produced a TTR = .49, the Caucasian boy a TTR = .47. The mean sentence length of the Negro boy was 6.81 (SD = 6.96), that of the Caucasian boy was 11.62 words (SD = 8.81); the difference between the means was significant ($p < .05$).

Semantic Differential

A semantic differential scale was constructed for each of four pupil-characteristics concepts: (a) Personality (14 polar items), (b) Social Behavior (7 polar items), (c) Academic and Intellectual Ability (14 polar items), and (d) Home background (7 polar items).

The five verbal labels chosen for the investigation were (a) Orthopedically Handicapped; (b) Mentally Retarded; (c) Emotionally Disturbed; (d) Culturally Deprived; (e) Normal. Five sets of instructions for Ss were constructed--each set being identical except for using one of the five labels to refer to the child heard on the tapes.

Procedure

Ss were randomly assigned one of the five sets of instructions (labels) prior to hearing the taped interviews. There were 20 Ss in each subgroup. The experiment was conducted in a large university classroom in two successive experimental sessions (50 Ss, 10 Ss from each subgroup being randomly assigned to one of the two sessions).

Ss were assembled and given the following instructions:

> You are about to hear two short tapes of interviews with children. Read the direction sheet carefully. It tells you how to proceed.

Each S read the following directions at his seat:

> You are about to hear a taped interview between a (label) boy and a student teacher. Please complete the following questionnaire as the type is played. At the end of the tape you will be given sufficient time to complete your questionnaire -- but try to go through it as rapidly as possible.

All Ss read the standard directions for completing the semantic differential.

Five subgroups of 10 Ss each were present in each session, each unaware that they were receiving different information about the child to be interviewed.

Session I presented the interview with the Negro child first. Ss were permitted ten minutes to complete the semantic differential scale following the end of the first taped interview.

After the completed scales had been collected, Ss were given another set of identical instructions containing the same reference label as the previous set. E said, "Now we want you to read the directions again on the new set of papers. You will notice that the directions are exactly the same as for the set you just completed. Now listen to the second interview and make your ratings." The same procedure used for the first tape was followed for the second tape.

The second session was conducted in exactly the same manner as the first except that the order of tape presentations was counterbalanced.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 summarizes the results of the analysis of variance used to assess the effects of (a) Label (b) Dialect and (c) Pupil Characteristics. The effects of Dialect significantly interacted with the Pupil Characteristics rated by the Ss. This interaction is represented in Figure 1. Post hoc analysis of simple effect revealed no significant differences between mean semantic differential ratings on the Personality scale for the two interviews. The Negro child received significantly lower mean scale scores on the Social Behavior ($p < .05$), Academic Intellectual Ability ($p < .01$) and Home Background ($p < .01$) scales.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Comparisons between characteristic scale means based on the Negro child's tape revealed that the Personality Scale mean was significantly higher than the other three scale means ($p < .05$). The latter three means

did not significantly differ from one other. There were no significant differences between mean scale scores based on the Caucasian child's tape for the four characteristics.

Figure 2 presents the mean scale scores received by the Negro and Caucasian child respectively for each item on the semantic differential scales. For purposes of presentation, pairs have been arranged so that traits assumed to be positive appear on the extreme right while presumably negative traits are all arranged at the extreme left of the scale. As indicated in Table 2, the mean score for the Negro dialect tape was significantly lower than the mean for the standard dialect tape. Labels assigned to the interviewees had no significant effect upon semantic differential scores (see Table 2.)

It was noted earlier that the mean sentence length in the responses of the two interviewees differed. The Negro child made significantly shorter replies than the Caucasian child did to the same questions. A subsequent study was undertaken to determine the possible influence of this difference on the preceding results.

Typed transcripts of the two interviews described earlier were presented to 128 college juniors who were enrolled in Education School courses but had not participated in the previous experiment. Ss were asked "to read the two transcripts carefully and based upon what was read, decide which was transcribed from an interview with a Negro child and which from an interview with a White child." Once they had decided on the race of the respondent, Ss were asked to indicate briefly what characteristics of the transcripts had determined their decisions.

A total of 66 Ss assigned the transcripts correctly, while 62 Ss did not. The differences between the frequencies was not significantly different from chance expectancy ($p > .05$). There was no indication of difference in the cues used by Ss in deciding the race of the interviewees from the transcripts. Of the 66 Ss who were correct in their decision, only nine mentioned using linguistic cues like syntax and sentence length. Of the 62 Ss who incorrectly assigned the transcripts, six made reference to linguistic cues. Hence, there appeared to be little evidence of an ability to identify the race of a pupil from a transcript of the pupil's verbal behavior during an interview--and no evidence that correct identifications were related to specific linguistic cues in the transcripts. It is plausible

to suggest that the negative inferences made about the Negro child were most probably cued by the dialect features of the child's verbal behavior, rather than by the average length of sentence utterances. The results suggest that non-standard Negro dialect is associated with a complex of relatively less positive inferences about the characteristics of a speaker than is the standard English dialect.

Interestingly enough, the disability labels had no differential effects on evaluative inferences. Since Semmel and Dickson (1966) and others have previously demonstrated the differential effects of labeling, it may be that the linguistic cues provided by dialect are so powerful that they minimize the effects of labeling.

References

Asch, S. E. Forming impressions of personality. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1946, 41, 258-290.

Guskin, Judith T. Negro Dialect: Effect on teacher's perception of ability and personality of students. Unpublished paper, University of Michigan, Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior, 1968.

Kelley, H. H. The warm-cold variable of first impressions of persons. Journal of Personality, 1950, 18, 431-439.

Lambert, W. E. A social psychology of bilingualism. Journal of Social Issues, 1967, 23, 91-109.

Semmel, M. I., & Dickson, S. Connotative reactions of college students to disability labels. Exceptional Children, 1966, 32, 431-439.

Footnote

[1] The research reported herein was performed in part pursuant to Contract OEC-3-6-061784-0508 with the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, under the provisions of P. L. 83-531, Cooperative Research, and the provisions of Title VI, P. L. 85-864, as amended. This research report is one of several which have been submitted to the Office of Education as Studies in Language and Language Behavior, Progress Report VII. September 1, 1968.

Table 1

Sequential Order of Questions Asked During Structured Interview

SCHOOL

What grade are you in school?
What kind of teacher do you have?
How does she help the children in your class?
What are your favorite subjects and why would you choose them?
If you were having quiet time in school, what sorts of things would you do with the other children in your class?
What do you think a teacher should do if she catches a child cheating on an arithmetic test?
If you saw the child cheating, what would you do?
What would you do if you had an arithmetic problem and you were having difficulty doing it?
If your class was having an election for class president and your name was suggested , what sorts of thing/would you tell the class you could do for them?

HOME

Tell me about your family
If you were pouring yourself a glass of milk after school and the glass slipped and broke, what would your parents say or do? What if your sister or brother did it?
Who is the boss in your family?
What jobs do you think children should do around the house? What should the parents do with the children if the jobs aren't done?

SELF

What do you like best about yourself?
What do you like least about yourself?
If you could be anyone in the world you wanted to be, who would you look and act like?

Table 2

Summary of ANOVA

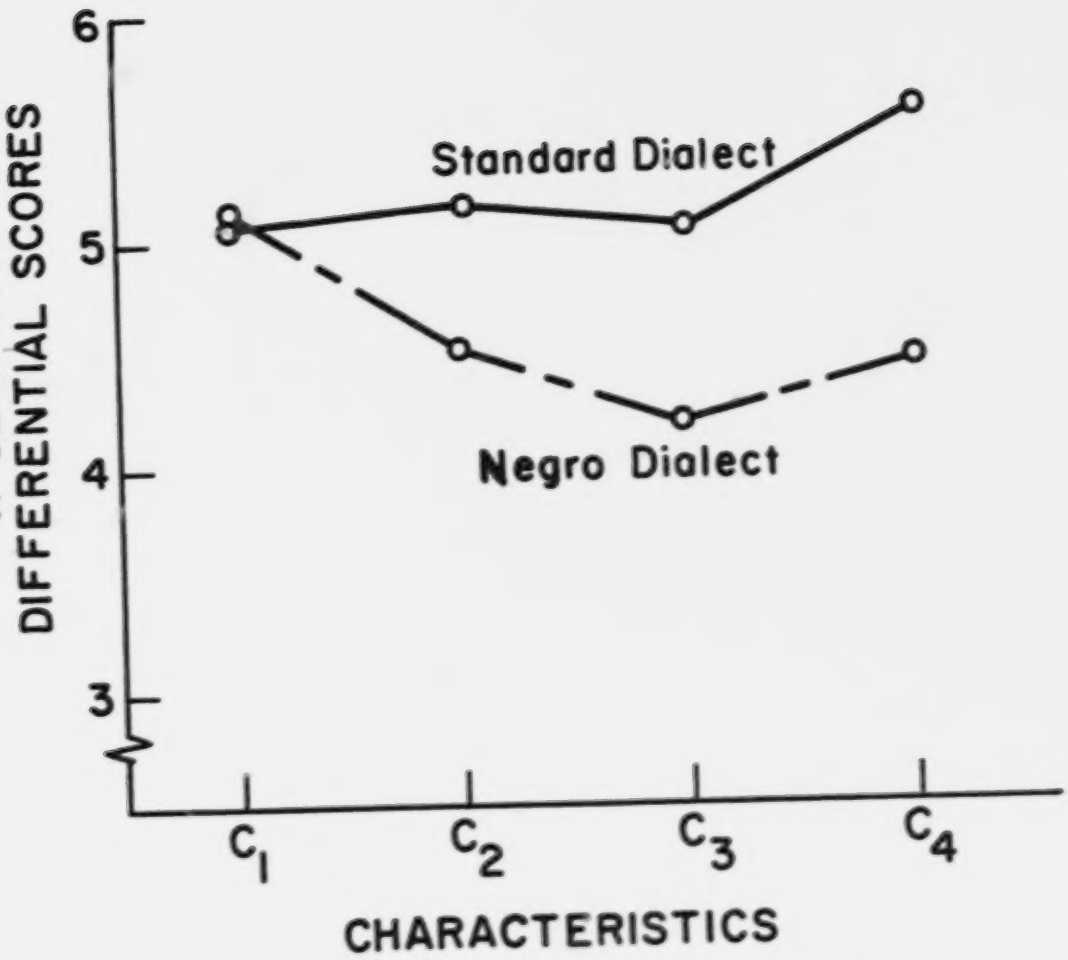
Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Between Ss	247.7964	99	———	
(Labelling grps) A.	20.1623	4	5.0400	2.103
Ss w/groups [error (a)]	227.6341	95	2.3960	
Within Ss	414.8437	700		
(Dialect) B	80.8292	1	80.8292	65.027**
AB	3.2393	4	.8090	.650
B x Ss w/grps. [error (b)]	118.0996	95	1.2430	
(Characteristics) C	26.7243	3	8.908	30.506**
AC	6.7928	12	.566	1.938
C x Ss w/grps. [error (c)]	83.4286	285	.292	
BC	35.8284	3	11.943	60.318**
ABC	3.3624	12	.280	1.414
BC x Ss w/grps. [error (bc)]	56.5391	285	.198	

** Sig. at .01 level

Figure Captions

Fig. 1. Mean semantic differential scores by characteristics for standard and non-standard dialects.

Fig. 2. Semantic differential ratings of standard and non-standard dialect groups on four variables.



C_1 = Personality

C_2 = Social behavior

C_3 = Academic, intellectual ability & school adjustment

C_4 = Home background

Figure 1

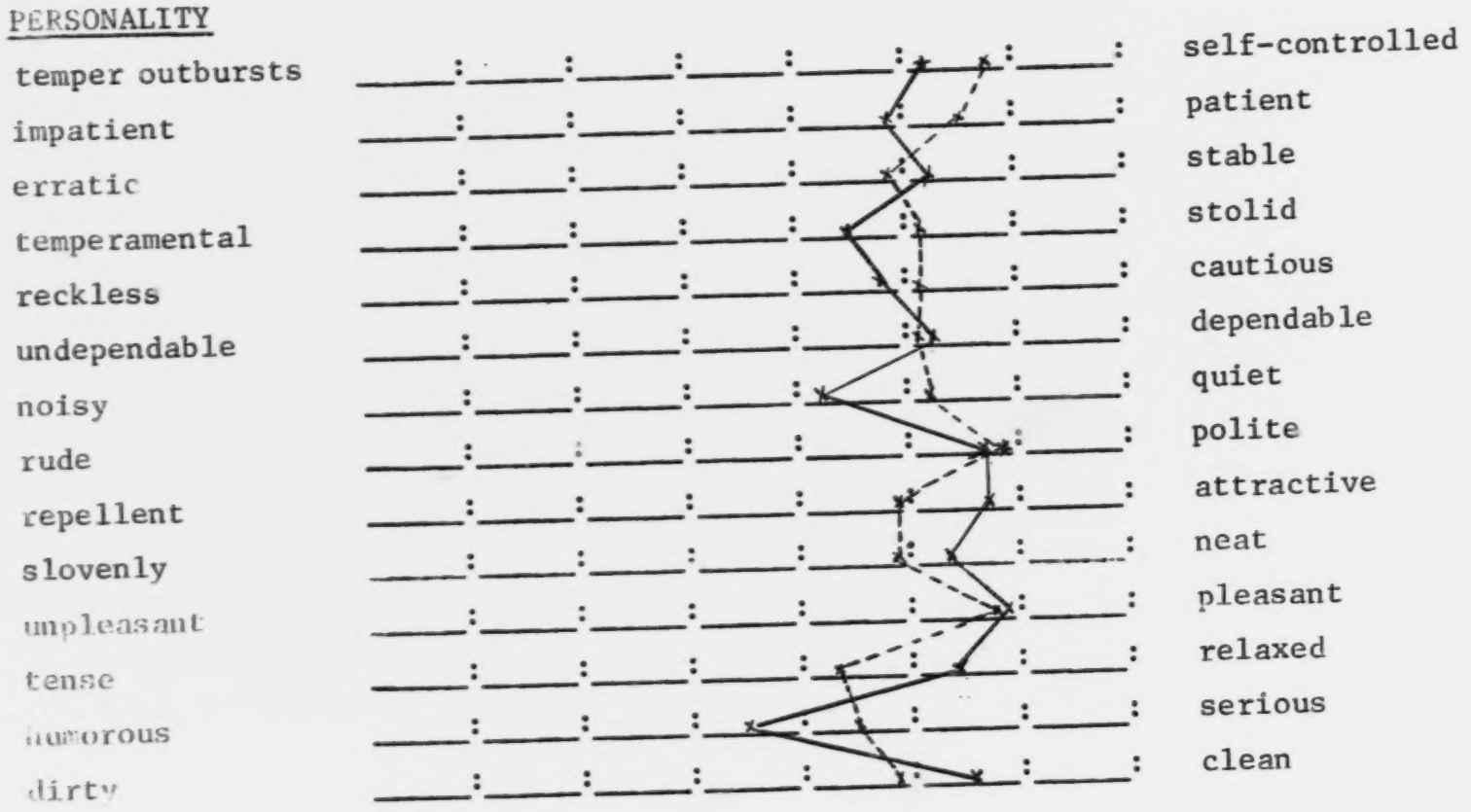


Figure 2

---- =Non-Standard (Negro) Dialect

____ =Standard (Caucasian) Dialect

Semmel, Figure 2 - continued